

## **Legal Services Trust Fund Program — State Bar of California Partnership Interim End of Year Evaluation (Revised)**

The Legal Aid Society of Orange County (LASOC) has made significant progress with its “I-CAN! (Interactive Community Assistance Network)” Project since it was funded in March of 2000. LASOC has taken I-CAN! from the conceptual stage of using technology to increase access to the courts to a functioning self-help system that enables *pro per* litigants to create properly formatted pleadings in many legal matters and in various languages. In addition to preparing pleadings, the system provides users with answers to frequently asked questions, delivers court tours, and educates users on the law, filing procedures and steps needed to pursue or defend their matter.

I-CAN! is deployed in both kiosk and web-based form. Kiosks are currently available at the following public sites: LASOC’s headquarters in Santa Ana, California; the Orange County Superior Court Family Law Information Center in the Lamoreaux Justice Center in Orange, California (hereinafter “Lamoreaux”); Irvine City Hall; the Orange County District Attorney’s Office Family Support Division in Santa Ana; and the San Juan Capistrano Public Library.

The I-CAN! design incorporates a user-friendly interface, a video guide and questions written at the fifth-grade literacy level, all of which allow persons with little or no computer experience to navigate through the system with ease. These special features, combined with extensive collaboration with the courts and legal services providers, have contributed to I-CAN!’s success.

Included in this report are an evaluation of the effectiveness of I-CAN services thus far, suggestions for improvement, response from users and other data. All of the information provided herein will be incorporated into the development process for I-CAN! in order to ensure that the I-CAN! Project achieves its goals. The University of California, Irvine, is also in the process of completing a comprehensive study on various aspects of I-CAN! to be published in early March.

### **High Priority Questions as Basis of Required Evaluation**

1. Which case types were most amenable to effective self-help assistance, and are there case types where self-help assistance is not effective?

All of the case types I-CAN! (Interactive Community Assistance Network) assists with were equally effective for self-help assistance in terms of completing/producing pleading documents. In May 2001, LASOC began tracking the number of users who were able to successfully produce a properly formatted legal pleading by utilizing I-CAN!’s services, available in the following 8 modules in multiple languages:

#### *Legal Matter*

1. Answer to Complaint for Paternal Obligations (ACPO)
2. Domestic Violence Restraining Orders (DV)

#### *Language Availability*

English, Spanish  
  
English, Spanish

3. License Denial Review	English, Spanish, Vietnamese
4. Petition to Establish Parental Relationship	English, Spanish
5. Small Claims	English
6. Wage and Earnings Assignment Hearing	English, Spanish
7. Waiver of Court Fees and Costs	English, Spanish
8. Unlawful Detainer Answer (to be deployed in March)	English, Spanish

From May 1, 2001 to January 1, 2002, self-help assistance was successfully given to 3,155 users of the 8 modules available in English, 429 users of the 6 modules available in Spanish and 50 users of the 1 module available in Vietnamese, for a total of 3,624 users. These numbers are accounted for through an online tracking system. I-CAN! services were first offered on November 17, 2000. From that date through April 30, 2001, the tracking system was not yet available; however, it is estimated that more than 5,500 persons created I-CAN! pleadings and documents during the entire time I-CAN! has been available.

The most widely used modules were Waiver of Court Fees and Costs, Answer to Complaint for Paternal Obligations and Petition to Establish Parental Relationship. From analysis of fully completed self-administered surveys incorporated into the I-CAN! system, approximately 97% of respondents found I-CAN! "easy or very easy to use" and approximately 95% found I-CAN! to be "helpful or very helpful." Therefore, based on a user-satisfaction standpoint, all case types were amenable to self-help assistance.

2. Which types of assistance (introductory workshops, written and video materials, one-on-one assistance, follow-up sessions) were most effective in various legal matters?

Based on 46 on-site personal user interviews for the DV and ACPO modules, approximately 64% of users who responded to the question about I-CAN!'s video guide, stated they did use the guides for assistance in completing pleadings. These users indicated that video assistance further clarified questions on the screen. At the Lamoreaux Justice Center, a clerk is available for initial instruction on how to use to the I-CAN! kiosk. Although the clerk is prohibited from answering specific legal questions for the *pro per*, users also felt that having a live person familiarizes users with the service.

3. Were *pro pers* more prepared after using a self-help center? Were forms more adequately prepared and, on balance, were cases less time-consuming for bench officers and clerks after self-help assistance?

*Pro pers* were more prepared to pursue their legal matter after using an I-CAN! kiosk to complete their pleadings and forms. Based on interviews with judicial officers and court personnel, cases were less time-consuming for bench officers and clerks because the responses provided by *pro pers* were not handwritten and all were properly formatted, thereby enabling the Court to more easily understand the legal and factual issues.

4. Where, and for what reasons, were litigants referred for representation or more complete assistance?

If clients did not qualify to complete the pleadings process, based on a number of targeted questions within each module, the user was then referred to the appropriate resources to further pursue their legal matter. In more complex cases where I-CAN! could not address the requests being made, users were also referred to the appropriate resources.

5. To what extent did *pro per* litigants have reasonable expectations before they received *pro per* assistance, and did expectations change as a result of the assistance?

The evaluation conducted by UCI and LASOC did not include a pre- or post-study of expectations of the *pro pers*' experiences with I-CAN!. Therefore, no I-CAN! user expectations were measured. The UCI evaluation concentrated on the broader effect of I-CAN! within the community. I-CAN! is primarily designed to help *pro pers* prepare certain pleading documents. Based on observations of users, most did have the expectation that they would be able to prepare a pleading conforming to court requirements, and that expectation was usually met.

6. Were *pro pers* satisfied with the assistance they received from the project?

Of the 1,601 online surveys completed, 401 contained responses to each of the questions. Based on the latter group, the following results were found:

English Speaking Respondents: 365 total

~ 97.8% found I-CAN! easy or very easy to use

~ 97.7% found I-CAN! helpful or very helpful

Spanish Speaking Respondents: 49 total

~ Nearly 96% found I-CAN! easy or very easy to use

~ Nearly 93% found I-CAN! helpful or very helpful

Of the 46 users who were personally interviewed in the field, all but one recommended the use of I-CAN to others, and this one person nevertheless recommended it to those with experience using a computer.

7. Were *pro pers* satisfied with their opportunity to make their case?

Although the question was not asked in this manner, LASOC understands from interviews and surveys that users were very satisfied with I-CAN!'s services and that judicial officers stated it was much easier to rule on cases presented through I-CAN! pleadings.

8. Were the outcomes of cases changed as a result of self-help assistance?

All judicial officers interviewed very much appreciated the use of I-CAN! pleadings by *pro pers*. LASOC was informed that, in general, the Court could more easily understand the relief sought by *pro per* litigants using I-CAN!. Additionally, several users told I-CAN!'s evaluator that they would not have completed pleadings without the assistance of I-CAN!.

9. Did the representation of opposing parties interfere with the effectiveness of self-help assistance?

This question is not applicable to this intervention.

10. On average, did self-represented litigants achieve results more consistent with the law and facts in their case, after receiving self-help assistance?

On the specific focus of this intervention, I-CAN! did produce more complete and consistent pleadings than those produced by unassisted *pro per* litigants. To that extent, the self-represented litigants who used I-CAN! did receive results more consistent with law and fact.

### Outcome Measurement

An I-CAN! evaluation completed by University of California, Irvine's (UCI) Dean of Sociology, James W. Meeker and his graduate student, Richard Utman, Jr., is currently in the process of being published. When completed, LASOC will forward the information to the State Bar in order to provide more comprehensive information about I-CAN!

- Were more judgments completed?

LASOC did not develop a baseline number of judgments prior to this evaluation. However, I-CAN! began providing services on November 17, 2000 and began online tracking of I-CAN! users on May 1, 2001. From May 1, 2001 to January 1, 2002, self-help assistance was successfully given to 3,155 users of the 8 modules available in English, 429 users of the 6 modules available in Spanish and 50 users of the 1 module available in Vietnamese, for a total of 3,624 users. As discussed above, it is estimated that more than 5,500 persons created I-CAN! pleadings and documents during the entire time the service has been available. All judicial officers interviewed who were familiar with I-CAN! found its pleadings acceptable. Those who dealt with cases involving I-CAN! produced pleadings said that I-CAN! pleadings were superior to those produced by unassisted *pro per* litigants.

- Were fewer defaults entered?

LASOC was informed by the District Attorney (DA) that fewer defaults were entered. Because of this fact, the DA contracted with LASOC to produce additional modules.

- Was service more often completed appropriately?

This question is not applicable to this intervention.

- Were fewer hearings continued due to procedural problems?

This question is not applicable to this intervention. However, since I-CAN! produces initial pleadings and answers, it should not create continuance problems.

- Were more stipulations reached?

This question is not applicable to this intervention.

- Did the litigant's legal situation appear to improve as a result of *pro per* assistance?

Based upon interviews with court personnel, I-CAN!-produced pleadings were more complete than those created by unassisted *pro per* litigants.

UCI utilized several methods for measuring outcomes. It conducted 46 user interviews as well as interviews with judges and court clerks. UCI also analyzed a selection of 30 court files and 1,609 surveys. UCI worked closely with LASOC to guarantee that it received the most up-to-date information I-CAN! gathered.

The following findings were made, which will be explained more extensively in the formal study to be submitted to the State Bar later this month.

1. I-CAN! works. It produces court forms that conform to Judicial Council standards.
2. People use I-CAN! to produce forms filed with the court.
3. People like I-CAN! and recommend it to others.
4. I-CAN! can assist other service providers in their work of assisting *pro per* litigants.
5. I-CAN! produced pleadings are accepted by judicial personnel and make their job easier.
6. I-CAN! users are better prepared for court sessions than unassisted *pro per* litigants.
7. In some cases, users need no further assistance after using I-CAN!, but I-CAN! works best as part of an integrated system of *pro per* assistance. Most I-CAN! users benefit from a review of I-CAN! produced pleadings and the user's legal circumstances by a professionally trained person to ensure accuracy of the pleadings and protection of legal rights.
8. I-CAN! benefits from the presence of a human monitor to not only check I-CAN! kiosks for their daily functioning, but also to introduce I-CAN! to new users and answer simple questions about how to start and use I-CAN!.